

# **Hemlock Elementary School**

## **2003-2004 Grand Jury Report**

### **I. Reason for Visitation**

The Grand Jury elected to visit a random selection of schools in the County.

### **II. Procedure**

The Grand Jury:

- Talked with school principal, teachers and staff
- Toured school facilities and observed students in classes and at recess
- Observed the school library, cafeteria, play areas and classrooms
- Reviewed school informational handouts that are sent home to parents, Academic Performance Index (API) reports, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report and teacher credential listing

### **III. Background**

1. Hemlock is a K-6 school with 370 students located in the Vacaville Unified School District. There are 18 classroom teachers, all fully credentialed. Class sizes are limited to 20 in kindergarten through second grade. Grades 3-6 have class sizes around 30. The school has had four different principals in the last four years, but the current principal is familiar with the school, having previously been a teacher at the school. The faculty age averages in the mid-40's so some retirements are likely in the next few years. In addition to the regular classroom teachers, the school has a PE teacher, reading specialist and special education teachers. There are 18 classified staff at the school.

2. Seventy-five students were enrolled at Hemlock for the first time this year as a result of the closing of Ulati School. Most of these students are Hispanic and many have parents with limited English. The addition of a bilingual secretary (formerly a secretary at Ulati) and a bilingual Kindergarten teacher has been helpful in easing the transition for the parents and students transferred from Ulati. To welcome the incoming Ulati students and to get to know one another better, many of the Hemlock teachers and students took a special trip for a picnic day to Ulati before it closed in the Spring of 2003.

3. Hemlock school is an older facility, built in 1955. The school is well maintained, but climate control is very poor, and there is little bulletin board display in the school outside the individual classrooms. Hemlock is scheduled for renovation, using Measure V bond funds, in 2004. This will include better lighting and new heating and air conditioning systems. Handicap access at the school is presently lacking, but will be added during the renovation. The school has 58 computers that are maintained by members of the faculty.

4. Many of the former Ulati students arrive by bus, so a new bus parking area has been designated on the side of the school, near the Kindergarten playground.

5. The school cafeteria serves both breakfast and lunch.

6. The school has a very active Parent Teacher Association (PTA). One of their activities was a welcome dinner for the parents of the newly transferred students which was well attended. Adults English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are held two nights a week in the school library and it was reported that many parents attend.

7. The library was well stocked and used very frequently. Many of the books came from the former Ulati school library.

#### **IV. Findings and Recommendation**

*Each finding is referenced to a background paragraph number.*

**Finding #1** - Most of the teaching staff is older, so there may be some retirements in the next few years. (1)

**Recommendation #1** - When new credentialed staff is needed, consider bringing in more bilingual teachers, not just to ease communication with students, but to encourage communication with non-English-speaking parents.

**Finding #2** - The school lacks good handicap access and places to display student work outside the classrooms. (2)

**Recommendation #2** - During the renovation process, ensure that handicap access is adequate and add additional bulletin board space in the common areas.

#### **V. Comment**

Hemlock School has undergone major demographic changes in the last year as the Vacaville Unified School District boundaries have changed and schools have been closed. The Grand Jury commends the faculty, staff and students at Hemlock for their efforts to welcome and assimilate the new students.

#### **VI. Affected Agencies**

- Solano County Office of Education
- Vacaville Unified School District
- Vacaville Unified School Board
- Hemlock Elementary School